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AUTHOR Hawke, Sharryl
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ABSTRACT

A student program to combat chronic absenteeism, suspension, and behavior problems was implemented in September, 1972, at Memorial Junior High School in San Diego. The major aim of the program is to develop a small school environment to foster the growth of the whole student. Objectives focus on helping students develop a positive attitude toward school, helping students and teachers develop improved interpersonal relations, and improving academic achievement. The school maintains 300 students and has its own staff and schedule. The staff adopts a "head-on" approach to problems, offering comprehensive testing programs which help teachers identify the academic needs of individual students. Seminars and simulations are used to deal with problems. Student centered curriculum motivates students toward academic achievement, involves students in activities, and, moreover, offers some opportunities for decision making. The school curriculum, based on interdisciplinary studies developed by the staff, centers on three themes which were suggested by an initial survey of student needs and interests: A New Dimension, The Personal Side of Living, and The World of Work. After two years, teachers are pleased with the flexibility and general results of their curriculum; results of achievement tests, to date, have been inconclusive. Future plans for the school include more individualized instruction and an expansion of the human relations program. (Author/JH)

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THE SCHOOL OF URBAN STUDIES: A School Within a School

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In 1971 Memorial Junior High School, San Diego, California, had the highest student absence rate among the city's junior high schools; 43 percent of Memorial's over 1,000 students were considered chronic absentees. Suspensions numbered 172.5 per 1,000 students, compared to a district average of 73.2. Unprovoked assaults were prevalent. Elementary schools in the area recommended any junior high but Memorial to their sixth graders; one feeder school had sent Memorial less than ten students in the two preceding years. Antagonism between the school's predominately b wn/black, inner-city student population and the predominately white, middle-class faculty was widespread.

In September 1972, 300 Memorial students were selected to participate in a new program called Project People, later to be known as the School of Urban Studies. The program was not merely an extracurricular activity, a single course, or a curriculum plan but a complete "school within a school." The aim of the program was to develop a small school environment which would foster the growth of the whole student. After two years, the results of the "minischool" are impressive.

The absentee rate of students in the School of Urban Studies has dropped from 7.4 per cent per day to 1.8 per cent. The rate of suspensions for teacher defiance has down from 17.1 per cent to 4.4 per cent among the program's students; unprovoked assaults are down by one-half. A survey of student attitudes shows 83 per cent of the Urban Studies students feel their teachers are personally interested in them, while only 32 per cent of a control group express the same feeling. No students have been lost from the program through ethnic or disciplinary transfers, and in 1973 Memorial experienced a 30 per cent increase in enrollment--an increase the school's principal attributes largely to the influence of the new program. Clearly, the School of Urban Studies is making a difference at Memorial Junior High.

SEEKING A NEW APPROACH

The School of Urban Studies was born from frustration. In recent years students at Memorial Junior High had experienced more remedial and compensatory programs than students in any other San Diego school. Despite the special programs, many of them excellent, the achievement level of the students remained frustratingly low and behavioral problems continued to mount. Still, in the face of this discouraging evidence, Memorial teachers remained convinced that their students had the potential for better performance. Based on this conviction, Robert Durham, then chairman of the Social Studies Department, suggested a program that in time developed into the School of Urban Studies.

In designing the new program, the first step was to assess the needs of Memorial students. This assessment resulted in a statement of objectives for the School of Urban Studies which continues to undergird the program; the objectives are (1) to help students develop a positive attitude toward school; (2) to help students and teachers develop improved interpersonal relations; and (3) to improve students' level of academic achievement.

The School of Urban Studies maintains 100 students each in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades; the school has its own administrative personnel, teaching staff, and schedule. The 300 students in the program are housed in an annex, which is separate from the main school building but close enough to allow Urban Studies students to intermingle with the rest of the Memorial student body.

In the School of Urban Studies students...

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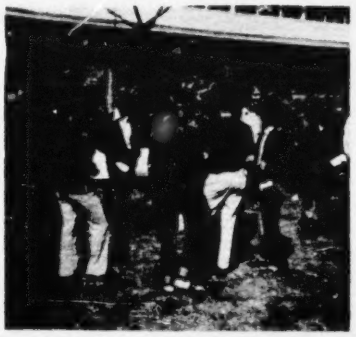
participate in program planning with team and human relations teachers

learn about careers in law enforcement from a policewoman



often hold class outside when studying subjects such as land use

work with children in community agencies

The teaching staff for the School of Urban Studies consists of 12 teachers assigned to three teams. Each team has a language arts, math, and social studies teacher; teachers of consumer education, industrial arts, and science/art split their time among the teams. Funding for the program provides for two additional staff teachers. One is a resource teacher who is responsible for curriculum, management, and evaluation; the second is a human relations teacher who is in many respects an ombudsman for students--someone to help solve problems between students and teachers, students and students, and, on occasion, students and parents.

The School of Urban Studies is at once a human relations program and a curriculum program. Durham, who is presently the coordinator/resource teacher for the program, describes the minischool this way: "It begins with human relations, then uses a curriculum designed to help students in the program understand themselves, others, and the requirements that society places on them. The emphasis in this program is on the total person."

Focusing on the whole student has led the staff to adopt a "head-on" approach to problems. A comprehensive testing program helps teachers identify the academic needs of individual students; counseling is provided for students with social and personal problems. The group and interpersonal needs of students are also confronted directly. Rather than ignoring interracial tensions or teacher/student antagonism, the School of Urban Studies implements activities, such as seminars and simulations, to deal with these problems.

The direct approach begins the first two weeks of school when new students are involved in an orientation session; during this time teachers attempt to set the tone for the School. Part of the orientation session is spent in testing and counseling, but much of the two-week period is devoted to small-group discussions in which students and teachers begin to develop a trust relationship. These human relations discussions are supplemented with simulations, movies, and a field trip--all designed to promote understanding and friendship among the participants. The staff feels the orientation is vital in breaking down preconceptions of both students and teachers about school and their respective roles in school.

THEMATIC CURRICULUM

While a human relations emphasis serves as the foundation for the School of Urban Studies, the day-to-day working of the program is based on interdisciplinary studies developed by the staff. A survey of student needs and interests, taken before the School of Urban Studies began, suggested that three subject areas were particularly important to students. The school's curriculum centers on the three themes suggested by this initial survey. The seventh-grade theme is "A New Dimension"; eighth and ninth graders choose from two themes, "The Personal Side of Living" and "The World of Work."

Each of the three themes has a different focus. In "A New Dimension," seventh graders are introduced to the School of Urban Studies and its approach; students are encouraged to see themselves as decision-makers as well as participants in the program. In addition to skills development in each academic area, this theme area attempts to develop a sense of responsibility, self-discipline, and citizenship in participants.

Students in this theme have an opportunity to engage in small-group activities, and to elect various special period known as A.I.T. (Activities in Theme

"The Personal Side of Living" is designed to study himself as an individual, a social being, and Knowing about themselves and how they are pa of ment helps students feel better about themselves, self-satisfying and responsible lives. The program to basic language arts, math, and social studies, consumer education, and industrial arts.

In the "World of Work" theme, students have the personal, social, and economic significance of plinary theme explores procedures and attitudes nec tion on the job, and techniques for managing the co promoted through exploration of career clusters, in careers, and individual and small group study trips

Each theme area is taught by a teacher team wh based on the needs of the students it serves; curri dent needs rather than content considerations. For that a common student need is to develop better ver each teacher on the team would aim toward improvin content as a vehicle. Block time periods help teac a one-hour period set aside each day for teacher t curriculum and materials.

EVALUATING PROGRESS

Has the needs-based curriculum improved stude ment tests given by independent investigators each areas students have shown definite gains; in other Durham feels the achievement results will only bec have participated in all three years of the progra group of junior high students.

After two years in the program, teachers are general results of their School of Urban Studies c edges that implementing such a program has not bee "meat on the bones" of the original program concep their conception of teacher roles and classroom cu also had to alter their perception of school being write." School record clerks and counseling perso assigning credit for interdisciplinary studies. T have been complex, but the needs the program is me these needs makes solving the problems seem worthw

SPECIAL FEATURES

The basic plan for the School of Urban Studie

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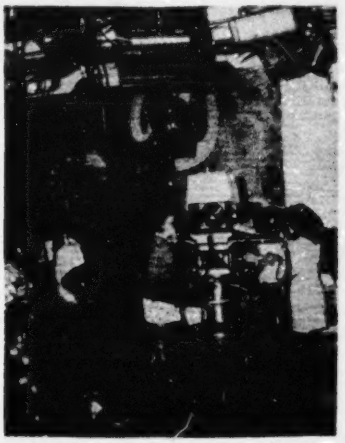
visit the superior court



explore a television station

encourage parents to participate in field study trips

practice "throwing" pizza

nity to engage in independent study, to partici- elect various ways of using their time during a ties in Theme).
designed to give the student an opportunity to al being, and an inhabitant of a complex world. are part of their natural and cultural environ- themselves, understand others better, and eau The program is interdisciplinary; in addition al studies, this theme includes science, art, s.
dents have the opportunity to become aware of nificance of work. This structured, interdisci- attitudes necessary to obtain employment and func- naging the consumer dollar. Career awareness is clusters, individual exploratory studies in p study trips to various places of employment. acher team which develops its own curriculum serves; curriculum development begins with stu- rations. For example, the team might conclude op better verbal communication skills. Thus, ard improving verbal skills, using subject area ods help teachers utilize this approach, as does or teacher teams to plan their interdisciplinary

proved student achievement? Results of achieve- tigators each year are inconclusive. In some ns; in other areas there have been no gains. ill only become meaningful when students who f the program can be compared with a control

eachers are pleased with the flexibility and an Studies curriculum. However, Durham acknowl- has not been easy; it has taken time to put rogram concept. Teachers have had to readjust classroom curriculum. Similarly, students have school being only "where you learn to read and seling personnel have had to devise new ways of studies. The problems created by the program rogram is meeting are also complex. And meeting seem worthwhile.

Urban Studies incorporates several innovative concepts: minischools, interdisciplinary studies, human relations seminars, and team teaching. But the staff has not stopped with these innovations; the School of Urban Studies includes several unusual features--features which may well be responsible for much of the program's success.

One important extra in the School of Urban Studies has been the human relations resource teacher. By having a staff member whose primary function is dealing with human relations, the School has been able to focus on developing the psychological and social sides of its students. While the human relations teacher often serves in a crisis intervention role, he also uses "preventative" methods--seminars, workshops, simulations--to forestall crisis situations. Group experience for teachers and students has been especially important in promoting better relations. One student notes, "I think that the students have a better opportunity of participating in learning because teachers are easy to get along with."

The human relations teacher is also responsible for promoting community and parental interest in the School. Parents are encouraged to become involved in the program by participating in planning workshops and by accompanying students on field study trips. Last year nearly 50 percent of the parents did accompany students in such activities, a much higher percentage of parents than normally participate in Memorial school functions.

Student motivation is considered a key element in the School of Urban Studies; again, the problem is not left to chance. Each team has developed a specific system of incentives to encourage students to participate in activities and to improve their classroom performances. Some techniques include self-selection of curriculum materials, student tutors, parent motivation and use of study trips to reward appropriate behavior.

The School of Urban Studies' staff is making an effort to involve students in the development of the program. Students are rewarded for participating in workshop sessions, committee meetings, and class discussions on program planning and role development. The staff has found students unaccustomed to direct participation in the educational process, but feel the opportunity is important in improving feelings of efficacy.

Initially teachers in the School of Urban Studies received few benefits from participation in the program; but now they have an additional planning period each day and an opportunity to participate in summer planning workshops. They are aided by the human relations teacher in solving behavioral problems and receive help in finding new materials and teaching techniques from the resource teacher.

The support and flexibility offered Urban Studies' teachers seems to have paid off. One teacher writes, "The teaching staff has a positive attitude toward teaching and their students; I think this is generally taken for granted but does not exist for the most part in the rest of the school. Anyone who doubts this should go sit in the lounge and listen."

NEW HORIZONS

In 1975 Memorial Junior High School will move into a new physical facility. In preparation for that move, the School of Urban Studies staff is planning program changes for the new open-space building. At this time the staff plans to combine the seventh

and eighth grades into a single unit and expand the number of students served by 50 percent. The ninth grade will be maintained as a separate unit.

Curriculum expansion will occur on two fronts. The teachers are presently preparing a series of Learning Assistance Packets which will provide more individualized instruction for students in basic skill and content areas. The human relations aspect of the program will be expanded by developing two six-week seminars--one in human relations and one in values clarification--in which every student will participate.

Adapting the school to the students, rather than the students to the school, is not the traditional approach in education. In the School of Urban Studies the untraditional approach seems to be working where other approaches have failed. While the students directly involved in the program have shown the most improvement, the Memorial population as a whole has demonstrated significant gains in the past two years; observers believe the gains are at leasc in part a result of the impact of the new program.

The results produced by the School of Urban Studies have firmly committed the staff to the program's concepts. As summarized by Durham, "In our opinion the program now being developed in the School of Urban Studies is the junior high program that will be the standard ten years from now."

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ERIC DOCUMENTS:

ED 086 590: TOWARD A HUMANISTIC BEHAVIORISM APPROACH TO TURNING ON TEACHERS: SOME OBSERVATIONS, RATIONALE AND TEACHER PROJECTS. 11 pp. MF: $.65, HC: $1.50. This behavior addresses the problem of dealing with teachers' feelings and value judgments. Problems of changing teacher behavior and attitudes toward students are discussed.

ED 085 459: PARTNERS IN URBAN EDUCATION: TEACHING THE INNER-CITY CHILD. 58 pp. Available from Silver Burdett Div., General Learning Corp., 250 James St., Morristown, New Jersey 07960 ($1.38). This handbook for teachers discusses a variety of topics related to teaching inner-city children, and particularly minority children.

ED 082 102: RACISM AND THE HELPING RELATIONSHIP: ONE METHOD FOR INCREASING AWARENESS. 12 pp. MF: $.75, HC: $1.50. This study explores the effects of a white, middle- and upper-class preference system on the helping relationship.

ED 080 921: MOBIUS STRIPS, PREQUACKEY, AND THE DUTCH CHOCOLATE APPLE. 39 pp. MF: $.75, HC: $1.85. Using a deliberately confusing and frustrating game exercise, the author attempts to present the student's perception of the conflicting demands that the school system places upon him. The report includes an example of a family behavioral contract, stating general and specific privileges and responsibilities.

For further information:

WRITE:

Robert H. Durham
The School of Urban Studies
Memorial Junior High School
2884 Marcy Avenue
San Diego, California 92113

If you know of other significant practices write a one page description, including the name and address of a person to contact for further information, and send to:

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